

12 Aug 2020

South China Morning Post

"Hong Kong artist Wong Ping's darkly humorous animated videos 'talk about things which are kind of taboo but experienced by people in their daily life'"

Link: <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/article/3097028/hong-kong-artist-wong-ping-darkly-humorous-animated-videos>

Lifestyle / Arts & Culture

## Hong Kong artist Wong Ping's darkly humorous animated videos 'talk about things which are kind of taboo but experienced by people in their daily life'

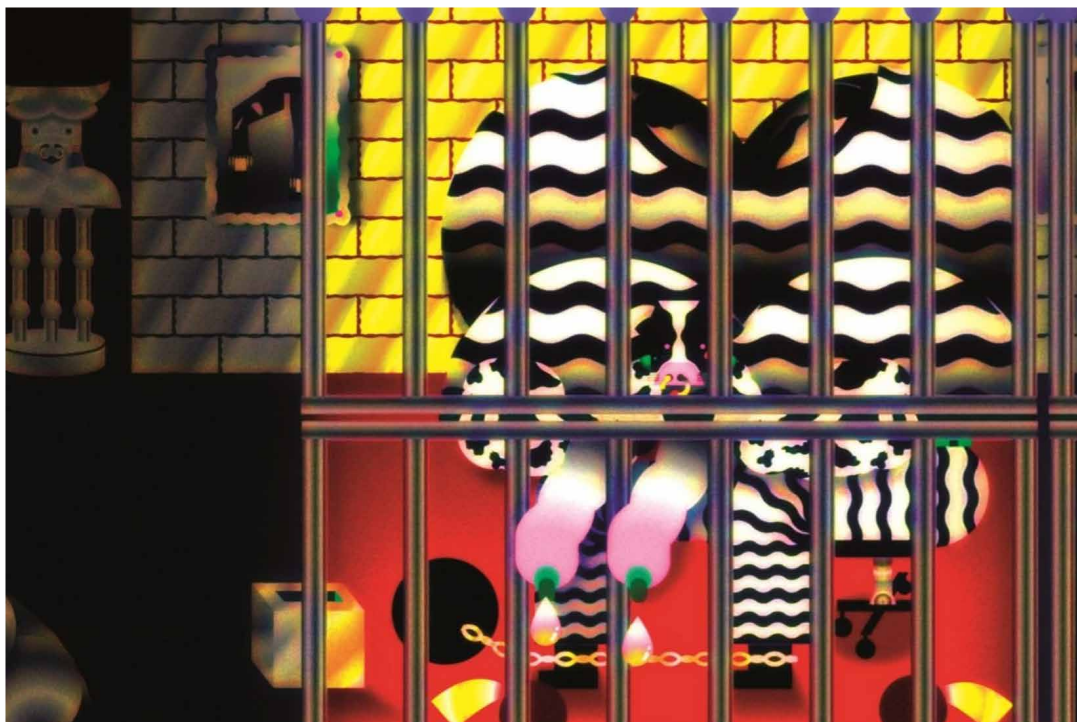
- Emerging artist Wong Ping's distinctive low-grade aesthetic and taboo subject matter has captured the interest of cultural institutions the world over
- He started making animations as a hobby to distract him from his monotonous day job doing post-production work in the television industry



Aaina Bhargava

Published: 12:45pm, 12 Aug, 2020

[Why you can trust SCMP](#)



A still of an imprisoned cow from Fables 2 (2019), an animated video inspired by Aesop's fables by Hong Kong artist Wong Ping. Image: Courtesy of Wong Ping / Edouard Malingue Gallery / Tanya Bonakdar Gallery

This summer, Hong Kong artist Wong Ping should have been in New York for the opening of his solo exhibition at New Museum, which has been postponed to March next year due to the coronavirus pandemic. The delay, however, is not likely to affect the 36-year-old's rising international trajectory.

Wong is known primarily for his vivid animated films that convey dark undertones; *Jungle of Desire* (2015), for example, features an impotent husband hiding in a wardrobe secretly watching his prostitute wife have sex with a police officer.

He got his big break in 2018 in London when he won the Camden Art Centre's inaugural emerging artist prize in conjunction with the Frieze Art Fair. The prize allowed him the opportunity to hold a solo exhibition at the centre, which he did in 2019 with "Heart Digger". Two more solo shows followed that year: "Golden Shower" at Kunsthalle Basel in Switzerland, and "The Modern Way to Shower" at the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami in the United States.

Most recently, he wrapped up "5 Tips for Politely Rejecting a Booty Call from Your Neighbour's Dog" at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, in the US state of Georgia, in July.



Wong's *Jungle of Desire* (2015) features an impotent husband hiding in a wardrobe secretly watching his prostitute wife have sex. Image: Courtesy of Wong Ping / Edouard Malingue Gallery / Tanya Bonakdar Gallery

But what is it about Wong's style that has captured the interest of cultural institutions the world over?

"It's awfully honest and humorous, it has a kind of Canto [Hong Kong] dark humour behind it," says Lorraine Kiang Malingue, who represents Wong. "There is this genuine sense of expression, which the art world can feel and appreciate."

Malingue started working with Wong in 2016 after seeing *Jungle of Desire* at Things That Can Happen, a now defunct non-profit art space in Hong Kong's Sham Shui Po neighbourhood. Picking up on the red light activities prevalent in the neighbourhood, Wong formed the storyline of the impotent husband who hides in a cupboard watching his wife have sex.

“When we saw the show we were both horrified and excited,” Malingue says of the audience reaction.



An image of Wong, edited by the artist. Image: Courtesy of Wong Ping / Edouard Malingue Gallery

Wong supplemented the video with eyebrow-raising sculptures, including a dildo strategically placed on a TV screen exhibiting a nude male torso.

For Wong, “it’s fun to talk about things which are kind of taboo but experienced by people in their daily life,” he says. “If I talk about something typical and general, it’s boring.”

“Anyone who sees his work gets it and feels it,” says Chantal Wong, who co-founded Things That Can Happen and is now the director of culture and workshops producer at the Eaton HK hotel. “His work can engage various communities; it is accessible in many ways even though it’s still very clever and dark.”



An installation shot of Wong's *Who's the Daddy* (2017) at Tai Kwun, Hong Kong. Photo: Courtesy of Tai Kwun Contemporary

Wong's dark and complex narratives touch on various social issues. *Fables 1* (2018) and *Fables 2* (2019), for instance – Wong's takes on Aesop's fables – feature satirical storylines with animals in place of the human characters. The videos, narrated by the artist in monotone, may seem simple on the surface, but allude to politics, capitalism and a number of other societal problems.

In *Who's the Daddy* (2017), Wong uses a familiar Chinese nursery rhyme to demonstrate how people are conditioned from a young age, with a young son repeatedly being told to kiss his father. The dynamics of the relationship explores the danger of repressed hatred and alludes to how control and limitations are politically enforced in society.



An installation shot of Wong's *Who's the Daddy* (2017) at Tai Kwun, Hong Kong. Photo: Courtesy of Tai Kwun Contemporary

Wong's video-making started as a hobby that provided much-needed respite from his monotonous day job doing post-production work in the television industry, which he joined after graduating with a degree in multimedia design from Curtin University in Perth, Australia, in 2005.

"It was a hobby – I would make videos in my spare time. I had no interest or knowledge about anything in the art scene. I never went to museums or took a painting class. I just enjoyed making animations when I got my day job done," Wong says.



## **I was thinking about how difficult it is to arouse pandas**

**Wong Ping on his upcoming show at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery**



The software he would use to remove wires, improve skin tone or change the body shapes of actors in the shows became the foundation on which his videos were built. Although such software isn't meant to be used for animations, through experimentation Wong created his own low-grade aesthetic.

While the quality of animation might fall short of professional standards, it is this distinctive style that has propelled Wong into an international art career since he started showing his work in 2015.



Installation photo of Wong's "Heart Digger" show at the Camden Arts Centre in London featuring a shot from his 2018 film *Dear, Can I Give You a Hand?* (back) and toy dentures for his work *The Ha Ha Ha Online Cemetery Limited*. Photo: Luke Walker

In his upcoming (also postponed) solo exhibition at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York, Wong is planning on producing what he calls a "Panda Lab" inspired by his friends complaining about the difficulty of their jobs.

"I was thinking about how difficult it is to arouse pandas – there is a person who needs to turn them on and make them have sex so they can reproduce. If they don't do it, they'll become extinct," Wong says.

"I'm trying to create a lab with machines for the pandas to ride. Maybe I'll have a giant image of myself as a doctor, and lab assistants with uniforms, and bamboo all over the place."

*Did you know that among the world's top five health care markets, China is the only one growing at double digits? Get a comprehensive industry review and insights on Covid-19 induced market shifts with the China Healthcare Report, brought to you by SCMP Research. **Sign up** for our 50% early bird discount now. You will also receive access to 6 closed-door webinars led by China healthcare's most influential C-suite executives. Offer Valid until August 12th 2020.*